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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IS](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: CODEL VOINOVICH MEETING WITH EGIS CHIEF SOLIMAN

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Stuart Jones
Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (S) Summary. EGIS Chief Omar Soliman told Ambassador and a visiting Codel led by Senator George Voinovich December 31 that he is optimistic progress will be made on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. However, Soliman was concerned with continuing Israeli criticism of Egyptian anti-smuggling efforts. He was worried that the Egyptians would not be able to work out an arrangement with the Israelis for Hajj pilgrims to return to Gaza. On Iran, Soliman said that the USG's release of the National Intelligence Estimate had altered the calculus through which Arab states are interacting with Iran. On Iraq argued that the Iraqi government needed to amend its constitution and that Prime Minister Malaki should not deal with the Iraqi people in a "sectarian way." End summary.

¶2. (S) Soliman led off the New Year's Eve meeting by telling the Codel that the region is at a special, critical juncture. Egypt is America's partner. Sometimes we have our differences. But Egypt will continue to provide the USG with its knowledge and expertise on the critical regional issues, such as Lebanon and Iraq. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the core issue; Soliman contended a peaceful resolution would be a "big blow" to terrorist organizations that use the conflict as a pretext. For this reason, President Mubarak is committed to ending the Israeli-Arab "stalemate."

¶3. (S) Soliman applauded the Administration's efforts, commenting that Annapolis had given hope and begun a process. The timing is right for progress based on four factors. First, the PA leadership is moderate and willing to negotiate. Second, Hamas is isolated and politically cut off in Gaza. Third, the Israelis are ready for peace; Soliman assessed that the GOI coalition is broad and strong, and larger than Rabin's coalition of the mid-nineties. Fourth, Arab states are ready to see an end to "the struggle."

¶4. (S) Soliman stressed that Egypt stands ready to help the U.S. effort. The GOE knows both the Palestinians and the Israelis, and knows the obstacles to peace. Soliman recommended two steps be taken. First, both the Israelis and Palestinians must be pressed hard to sign an agreement, which the U.S. and international community could endorse, to be implemented at the proper time. Second, the U.S. should insist that "phase one" of the Roadmap should be completed before the end of 2008.

¶5. (S) Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Soliman opined that the

Palestinian Authority was ready to sign an agreement, but that establishment of a state may take between 1-3 years. While Hamas is isolated politically and unable to stop an Israeli-PA agreement, it remains entrenched in Gaza, and it was unclear to Soliman how long that would last. At one point in the discussion, Soliman seemed to imply Hamas may remain in control of Gaza for more than a year; at another juncture, he told Senator Voinovich that if negotiations proceeded briskly, Hamas may be forced to cede power in Gaza in 3-4 months. The bottom line for Hamas, according to Soliman, is that they must be forced to choose between remaining a resistance movement or joining the political process. They cannot have it both ways, he said.

¶16. (S) Palestinian training: Soliman reiterated GOE willingness to train and support Palestinian security forces. He claimed that the GOE had training facilities ready, but that he was waiting for an answer from U.S. Security Coordinator General Keith Dayton. (Note: We have advised Soliman that initial training of Palestinian security forces will take place in Jordan, and that we will revisit the option of training in Egypt this spring. End note). He continued that the GOE would keep pressure on Hamas but will maintain "low-level" contacts with Hamas. Egypt, he said, wants Hamas isolated. The Qassam rocket attacks must stop. When they do stop, the GOE will ask Israel to "meet quiet with quiet."

¶17. (S) Border issues: Senator Voinovich asked Soliman why the Israelis continue to report problems with Egypt's anti-smuggling efforts. Soliman said that the Israelis do not complain to him directly, and that GOI-GOE cooperation and exchange of information continues. He was at a loss as to why Israeli politicians continue to criticize Egypt publicly. The GOE would like the USG to be included in the GOI-GOE LAWIO discussions, but the Israelis continue to object. "They don't want a witness in the room," Soliman said. Nevertheless, Soliman was willing to turn the page. "We have a short time to reach peace. We need it. We need to wake up in the morning with no news of terrorism, no explosions, and no news of more deaths. We want everyone happy. That is the Egyptian dream."

¶18. (S) Syria: Congressman Turner asked if Iran and/or Syria might be play a spoiler role. Soliman answered that Syria wants desperately to halt the United Nations special tribunal on the Hariri assassination. At the same time, the SARG is ready to negotiate with the Israelis, and Soliman believed that the GOI also is ready. Syria, Soliman said, can be induced to play a constructive role but added that there are no guarantees, however, on Syrian performance.

¶19. (S) NIE: Regarding the USG's National Intelligence Estimate of Iran's nuclear program, Soliman was concerned that many in the Arab world were recalculating their position vis a vis Iran based on an assumption that the NIE represented a USG policy shift. Soliman said the Egyptians are working to correct this misimpression among Arab states. "We tell the Arab world: Don't be happy with the NIE and don't warm up to Iran. We know that the United States will never allow Iran to have a nuclear bomb."

¶10. (S) Iran: Soliman said that Iran remains a significant threat to Egypt. It continues to influence Shiaa in Iraq and the Gulf. Iran is supporting Jihad and spoiling peace, and has supported extremists in Egypt previously. If they were to support the Muslim Brotherhood this would make them "our enemy," he said. The GOE continues to press the Iranian regime to turn over extremists given "safe harbor" in Iran. This issue, he said, will remain an obstacle to improving Egyptian-Iranian relations. (Soliman met with Iranian former nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani earlier in the week. Larijani was in Egypt on a week-long "private visit."

¶11. (S) Iraq: Soliman said he remains concerned that the Maliki government in Iraq is not representing all Iraqis (i.e. the Sunni population). The GOE has urged Maliki not to deal with the Iraqi people in a sectarian way, and to amend

to constitution to allow greater Sunni representation. In addition, the Iraqi government must remove militias from the ranks of the army and police. In the long run, Soliman did not think that the decrease in violence would be sustainable absent these two steps. In addition, Iranian influence is problematic. Soliman said that the GOE had worked to reconcile 21 clans and tribes in Iraq, with good results, and that this kind of efforts had to continue. He assessed that both Sistani and Sadr were practical men, and able to be dealt with.

¶12. (U) Delegation composition:

Senator George Voinovich (R-OH)
Congressman Mike Turner (R-OH)
Congressman Steve Pearce (R-NM)
Congressman Rob Bishop (R-UT)
Congressman Phil Gingrey (R-GA)

¶13. (U) The delegation did not clear this message.
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